

**For immediate release**

**June 11, 2015**

**Review Officer lays out vision for modernization of Nova Scotia’s access to information and privacy regime**

**Halifax** – Today Catherine Tully, Nova Scotia’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Review Officer, released her office’s annual report for 2014-15. In the report, Tully describes a vision of a Nova Scotia government that actively discloses vital information, and that vigorously protects the privacy of its citizens.

“The purpose of access legislation is to ensure that government is fully accountable to the public,” Tully says in the report. “In the digital age, this should mean that government information is, for the most part, readily available online and without request. The information should be well-indexed and easily accessible. In fact in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this also means that government makes available large data sets of information to allow citizens to take advantage of information collected and used by governments.”

The report also identifies key modern-day privacy protections that will ensure citizens’ data are effectively protected. In particular, Tully recommends that individuals and the Review Officer be notified of privacy breaches whenever there is a real risk of significant harm to the individuals, and that the Review Officer be made an officer of the legislature to ensure fully independent oversight.

“These protections are essential to ensuring that citizens’ data is protected and that there is proper oversight of the activities of government that impact individuals’ privacy,” says Tully.

The report notes that the review office has had significant success in reducing a backlog of close to five years. Since September, 2014, the review office closed twice as many files as in the previous year, while seeing a substantial increase in the number of files coming in. The report also notes that the review office held more than 50 engagement sessions around the province, and produced 15 new publications.

That success has allowed Tully to set a target that by 2017, all review office files will be closed within an average of 90 days. That target forms part of Tully's goal of efficient and effective service by the review office. Among her other major goals, Tully has identified: 1) an open and accountable public sector; 2) respect for and protection of privacy by the public sector and health custodians; 3) public awareness of access and privacy rights. These goals, taken together, will help move Nova Scotia toward an effective access and privacy regime that helps ensure a thriving democracy.

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